

THE OLD COLONIAL SYSTEM

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The old colonial system by Gerald Berkeley Hurst

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GERALD BERKELEY HURST

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COLONIAL SYSTEM**

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PREFACE

IN 1902 I published a sketch of "English Public Opinion after the Restoration," and it seemed natural to follow the colonising ideals of that period into a subsequent age of more self-conscious empire. I found an additional incentive in courses of lectures on the rise of Greater Britain and kindred topics, which I have given during the last few years in various parts of Lancashire and Cheshire in connection with the University Extension scheme of the Manchester University. One feature, which has characterised every audience with whom I have come in contact, is a complete misunderstanding of the old colonial system.

That system was in truth marked by many faults in theory and practice, and in the ensuing pages, it will, I trust, be seen how unfitted it was to sustain a great empire without radical amendment. Yet it is wrong to regard the policy under which Greater Britain evolved, and for which most English statesmen from Cromwell to Chatham strained every effort, as selfish fatuity, unworthy of the race. In the United States, this superficial view is no longer deemed a necessary tenet for the patriotic, and the circumstances under which the War of Independence arose have been approached in a truly scientific spirit, but in our own country, a traditional Whiggism still permeates most popular histories.

The genesis of the present volume lies in my desire to treat the question in a more impartial manner, and in my concern at the exasperating prevalence of this misconception of imperial history. Since I first studied the subject

as an undergraduate of Lincoln College, I have tried to dissociate discussion of the controversies of the past from the political partisanship of the present.

The materials which I have used are sufficiently indicated by the footnotes. I have had access to the numerous tracts and pamphlets therein referred to, in the Bodleian, in the Manchester University Library, and in the Manchester Free Reference Library. In regard to the due choice and appreciation of authorities, and to the general handling of the theme, I am greatly indebted to Professor Tout. His criticisms have made me aware how hard it is even to try to epitomise a vast subject in the compass of a single volume. I also owe thanks to Mr. J. A. Doyle of All Souls' College, Oxford, for valuable suggestions.

Manchester,
October, 1905.

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INTRODUCTION

THE present work is intended to weigh the causes, character and results of Great Britain's old colonial system. It is proposed to examine the popular conception of the uses of empire during those portions of the reigns of George II. and George III., when that system reached its zenith. In this respect, the ideas which led the nation to choose its distinctive imperial policy, and to embark upon the two wars of the period will be dealt with at greater length than the actual details of any legislation or campaigns. Such details are ascertainable exactly and are familiar to the world, but on the other hand there can be infinite variety in representations of public opinion. It is however probable that this subject is characterised by unity, that the contrast between the Britain of 1756 and the Britain of 1775 is only superficial, that cleavage from America was due to no sudden accident of haphazard impolicy, and that there is nothing to dissociate the statesmanship which directed Wolfe to strike at Quebec, and Hawke at Quiberon, from that which allowed Burgoyne to drift to Saratoga, and Cornwallis to Yorktown. In each case the national aim was the maintenance of the same imperial ideal, and only the concurrence of colonial with British interests in the Seven Years' War disabled the politicians of the time from betraying that their ideal had feet of clay. At all events, the forces in English life, which made the struggle with France so popular and successful under Pitt, led obviously to the policy that culminated in the War of Independence; and for this